The Potential of General Classroom Observation: Turkish EFL Teachers' Perceptions, Sentiments, and Readiness for Action

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine Turkish EFL teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation. 204 teachers from different school settings responded to an online questionnaire. Data were analyzed according to three types of attitudes towards classroom observation: perceptions, sentiments, and readiness for action. The findings revealed that the majority of teachers were positive about classroom observation although they did not have much experience. Moreover, advantages of classroom observation were greater than disadvantages according to teachers. The outcomes call for well-organized and systematic classroom observation practices for Turkish EFL teachers to contribute to their professional development.

Keywords: classroom observation; EFL teachers; teacher education; teacher professional development

1. Introduction

Classroom observation has been recognized as an alternative assessment for evaluating learner performance (Campbell & Duncan, 2007), an important component of a staff appraisal mechanism (Lam, 2001), a tool for self-monitoring (Wichadee, 2011), a unique device for educational supervision (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010), and a valuable instrument for self-assessment (Choopun & Tuppoom, 2014). In fact, observation is the simplest research method that teachers can engage in their own classrooms (Ma & Ren, 2011) as they would easily face countless matters in the classrooms.

There are different types of classroom observation for teachers. The most frequently implemented one is the one completed by the student teachers, who are supposed to observe their mentors as a requirement in their teacher education programs. The opposite is also common practice: mentor teachers or university supervisors observe student teachers both to provide feedback and to assess their teaching performance during their visits to practicum schools. On the other hand, in-service teachers play the role of observer not only for raising pre-service teachers but also for their own professional development. They observe their peers or beginning teachers from time to time. Their roles as observees are also evident: being observed by their peers, teacher trainers, researchers, school inspectors, and pupils. Indeed, the situation shows some form of diversity in the Turkish context. Turkish EFL teachers are sometimes observers to student teachers whereas other forms of observation are not very popular in the current system. On the other hand, almost all of them are observees just because school inspectors are supposed visit their classrooms for teacher appraisal while very few are observed by researchers or teacher trainers for research purposes or by student teachers for mentoring purposes. Classroom observation activities as observers or observees are very limited to them, especially for their professional development.

1.1 Background to the Study

Classroom observation is "the bridge between the worlds of theory and practice" (Reed and Bergemann, 2001, p. 6). In other words, it is an operative gismo of learning how instructional methods are implemented, how teaching spaces are structured, and how learners react to the classroom setting. According to Farrell (2008), classroom observation in a reflective practice agenda can provide language teachers with an opportunity to gather information about their own teaching and classroom practices in order to push them to scrutinize classroom actions more carefully. Kumaravadivelu (1999), on the other hand, puts forward a 'critical classroom observation', which includes teacher's self-observation of a class accompanied by the pupils and an outside observer, as a method to involve teachers in the course of conceiving their own teaching.

Comments of a supervisor or an outside visitor about teachers' classroom practices are unquestionably leading cradles

of feedback for foreign language teachers. However, as for the reason that observation is typically utilized for supervising or evaluating teachers, the self-knowledge it might offer has commonly been disregarded (Crandall, 2000). Even if the central drive to visit classrooms is to evaluate teaching performance, it holds some other valuable advantages. For example, observing peers help teachers gain an awareness about their own teaching. In this way, they are better able to see their own instruction in others' practices to gain self-knowledge within a prospect to reconstruct their knowledge about teaching (Wichadee, 2011). Moreover, classroom observation can be an operational means for aiding foreign language teachers to notice the link between their views and classroom actions (Farrell, 2006). There is also an increasing belief that teaching should be regarded as a profession in terms of teachers' role in developing theory and guiding their professional growth by means of collaborative observation (Crandall, 2000) as teachers are eager to participate in observation tasks when they are intrinsically motivated and are faithful to their job despite several obstacles (İyidoğan, 2011).

Although classroom observation is a valuable tool for professional development, it is not obstacle-free. According to Wang and Day (2002), the link between teacher observation and endorsement of teacher learning and professional development is quite weak, and it is valuable only if observation tasks are meaningful, focused, and systematic (Velez-Rendon, 2002). Moreover, classroom observation might be intimidating for teachers who are to deliver their lessons in front of an onlooker (Ali, 2007). It is also evident that EFL teachers' participation in professional development activities is negatively influenced because of frequent changes in the educational system, the teaching context, and the lack of sense of comfort (İyidoğan, 2011). In the same vein, peer-observation is often implemented for assessment or evaluation purposes, which could be harmful for teacher confidence as well as for the presence of a supportive teaching environment (Cosh, 1999). Some teachers are naturally nervous about the outlook of an observer sitting in during their lesson, and whenever the observer is an evaluator or an undesirable interference, the feeling of 'anxiety, frustration, or resentment' will increase (Bowen & Marks, 1994). Age and experience of teachers also matter in willingness to take part in classroom observation: while beginning teachers or the ones with fewer ears of experience are more likely to be volunteers for being observed, the experienced teachers are mostly hesitant (Bettinelli, 1998). It is also apparent in literature that Turkish instructors are not very motivated to rely on that classroom observation by supervisors is essential to their professional development; what is more, classroom observations carried out by school administrators or inspectors are not considered as effective practices for their professional development (Çelik, Mačianskienė, & Aytın, 2013).

Some scholars have searched for the attitudes of teachers towards classroom observation in different settings. In an earlier study, Wang and Seth (1998) investigated the teachers' reflections after participating in a classroom observation activity as a tool for self-development: Although Chinese teachers were positive about classroom observation, the long-lasting post-classroom observation feedback sessions and not observers' disinterest to address teachers' specific wishes were problematic. Lawson (2011) examined the role of a sustained program of classroom observation on teachers' practices in their classrooms; the researcher suggested that teachers could change their procedures and presentations more easily while they were planning for learning and their habits for assessing learning. In the Hong Kong context, Lam (2001) acknowledged that primary school educators were less likely to welcome observers in comparison with secondary and special education teachers; however, all teachers were positive about a model of peer observation and coaching.

In an ESL context, Wang and Day (2002) documented the perceptions of teachers related to their experiences of classroom observation and identified several problems: Being observed was a highly stressful experience; teachers were confused about the purpose of observation; they forced themselves to show their best performances unnaturally; they were embarrassed or threatened from time to time. In a recent inquiry, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) documented that the majority of Spanish EFL teachers held positive attitudes towards classroom observation as the advantages of observation prevail over the disadvantages in their minds although anxiety-provoking nature of observation and time constraints led to limited willingness to take part in possible observation activities. More recently, Rahmany, Hasani, and Parhoodeh (2014) found that less experienced teachers with less than five years of teaching experience were more influenced by the supervision process in terms of making decisions in the classroom whereas teachers with six to ten years of teaching experience looked like to be the most worrywarts.

As there have been limited empirical research to illuminate the classroom observation issue from the teachers' eyes, the need for identifying teachers' likes vs. dislikes positive vs. negative attitudes as well as the advantages vs. disadvantages of classroom observation practices is quite obvious. The optimum conditions for creating classroom observation practices as a tool for professional development can be established by examining and documenting these attitudinal actions.

1.2 Theoretical Framework and the Research Questions

According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), it is essential to scrutinize the beliefs and philosophies which trigger their classroom practices in various aspects of classroom teaching. As a matter of fact, "what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe, and that teacher knowledge and 'teacher thinking' provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teacher's classroom actions" (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 29). This assumption simply reflects the three dimensions of teaching: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Lynch, 1989).

The theoretical framework for this study was drawn by an earlier work on classroom observation (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). According to this framework, there are three components of the attitudes towards classroom observation: cognitive, affective, and conative. The cognitive component deals with the beliefs and opinions of teachers about classroom observation. The affective component, on the other hand, is about the likes and dislikes of the teachers concerning classroom observation practices. The conative component, finally, is related to an individual's readiness for action and likeliness to participate in an action.

The research structure of this study is outlined in Figure 1. According to the framework, first, perceptions are replaced by the cognitive component as teachers' perceptions would reflect their thoughts and beliefs regarding classroom observation. Second, sentiments are considered as the affective side of the teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation. Last, readiness for action is taken as the foreign language teachers' actions and behaviors to participate in a potential observation activity within a query if they find it advantageous.
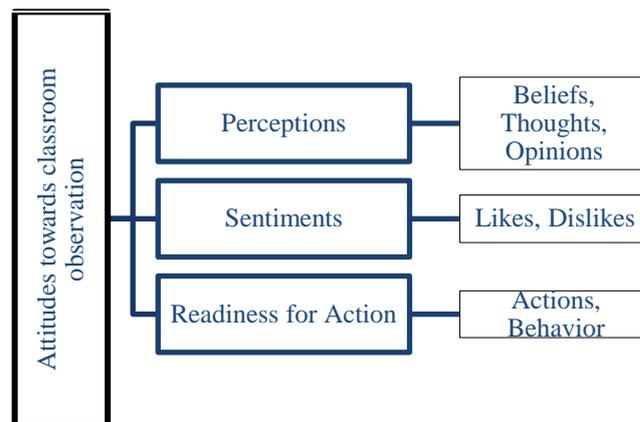

Figure 1. Three components of classroom observation

Based on the theoretical structure and the previous research on classroom observation, the following research questions were formed:

1. What are the perceptions of Turkish EFL teachers about classroom observation?

2. How do they feel about classroom observation?

3. Are they ready for classroom observation practices?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 204 (45 male and 159 female) teachers teaching English at various regions of Turkey in different teaching contexts: primary school (10.78%), secondary school (44.12%), high school (24.02%), university (9.8%), and private language school (5.39%). The distribution of the participants according to years of experience in teaching English was as follows: 22.06% for 1-2 years, 31.37% for 3-5 years, 32.84% for 6-10 years, 11.76% for 11-15 years, and 1.96% for 16 and more years. The majority of the teachers had a BA in ELT (89.71%) while few of them held an MA (8.82%) or PhD (0.98%) degree, or a BA in a different discipline than ELT (0.98%). Demographic features of the participants reflected that the participant teachers in this study were mostly female, young, BA-holding, and primary or secondary school English teachers serving in Turkish context.

2.2 Instrument

In order to elicit the necessary information about teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation, an online questionnaire was designed. The 'Observation in the (foreign) language classroom' questionnaire (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011) was obtained from the researchers with a permission of use, and was adapted for a more effective use for

the present study. The questionnaire was translated from English to Turkish (the native language of the participants) to avoid any misunderstandings or misinterpretations using the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). The questionnaire had 31 items. There were five items to elicit the demographic features of the participants. The remaining 26 items aimed to find out about teachers' perceptions, sentiments, and readiness for action related to classroom observation. 13 items (10 closed and three open-ended questions) examined teachers' beliefs and ideas about classroom observation with questions such as '*How important do you think are the following to improve your teaching?*' Seven items (two closed and five open-ended questions) measured the likes and dislikes of teachers about classroom observation through questions like '*Who would you like to be observed by?*' Five questions (one closed and four open-ended) elicited information related to teachers' readiness for a possible classroom observation activity as well as their opinions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of classroom observation. Finally, an open-ended item requested teachers to write anything they would like to add about classroom observation.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data for this study were collected through an online survey tool as teachers from different locations were in the target population. The call for a questionnaire was announced via social media groups of EFL teachers in Turkey. The collection of data lasted two weeks to allow teachers time to see, decide, and respond to the questionnaire. The closed items were analyzed using the descriptive statistics including mean scores, frequencies, and percentages according to the nature of the items. The open-ended questions, on the other hand, were analyzed following the Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, all teachers' comments were listed for each question. Second, comments indicating similar ideas were grouped and considered as themes, and each theme was labelled. Here, one experienced researcher in the field in addition to the researcher worked as co-raters. The categorization and labelling were done separately by the tow raters and an inter-rater reliability was computed by using a 'point by point method' with a formula of the number of agreements divided by the number of the agreements plus disagreements multiplied by 100 (Tawney & Gast, 1984). The inter-rater reliability was .90 for this procedure. The comments analyzed were translated from Turkish, the participants' mother tongue, into English by the researcher to present them in the study in the form of sample extracts.

3. Presentation of the Findings

The findings of the study are presented in three sub-titles: Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions, sentiments, and readiness for action in regard to classroom observation. The advantages and disadvantages of classroom observation as well as some other valuable ideas from the participant teachers regarding observation are also presented in the following sub-sections in detail.

3.1 Perceptions

As for the first finding, the teachers were rather poor about finding ways to improve themselves as foreign language teachers as 21.08% of them indicated that they never attended an activity such as courses, seminars, or conferences on foreign language learning/teaching. 48.04% of them mentioned taking part in these kinds of activities once a year while 22.06% two or three times a year and only 8.82% more than three times a year. Similarly, 64.18% of the teachers indicated that they had never attended courses, seminars, or conferences related to classroom observation. Additionally, 28.43% of the teachers said that they had never read any books or articles on classroom observation while 58.33% stated reading a few; only 13.24% of them indicated reading many.

In response to the usefulness of certain aspects of foreign language teaching, classroom observation was considered either as important (53.43%) or very important (37.75%) by the teachers. It was of little importance or not important at all for very few of them (7.35% and 1.47% respectively). Table 1 presents the place of classroom observation among the other aspects of classroom foreign language teaching. Furthermore, teachers indicated that classroom observation was an effective way of improving their teaching skills. The majority of the teachers either agreed (40.69%) or absolutely agreed (52.94%) with the idea that classroom observation was an effective way of improving their teaching; 5.39% of them neither agreed nor disagreed, and only two of them disagreed with the statement.

Table 1. How important do you think are the following to improve your teaching

	Not at all important	A little important	Important	Very Important	Total
Educational Psychology	1	5	70	128	
Foreign Language Learning	2	7	37	158	
Foreign Language Teaching Methods	1	8	52	143	
Teaching Experience	2	14	51	137	
Phonetics and Pronunciation	1	16	68	119	
Classroom Observation	**3**	**15**	**77**	**109**	**204**
Assessment and Evaluation	3	30	89	82	
Educational Theory	14	63	80	47	
Linguistics	12	69	67	56	
Use of Literary Texts	24	86	58	36	

In order to elicit teachers' attitudes towards their possible past experiences, they were asked a set of questions. The analyses indicated, first, that more than half of them had never been observed by a student teacher (59.80%) while a certain portion (40.20%) experienced it. The perceptions of teachers who had the experience about that practice were quite diverse: while one third perceived it as a very useful activity to improve themselves, one third said it was a little useful, and the remaining ones indicated that it was not useful at all. The comments made by the teachers, who found the experience as useful were mainly centered on the fact that they were more careful and well-prepared about the day of observation. For instance, Teacher 2 said, '*I went to the class I was observed in a better-prepared well, and this helped me have more enjoyable classes*'. In a similar vein, Teacher 199 pointed, '*I learned from the student teachers that I was using a high-level English, and I started to modify it*'.

In fact, teachers' experiences about observation were not limited to being observed by student teachers. The majority of them (81.86%) indicated that they were observed in their English lessons by someone rather than student teachers. They specified that they were observed by an inspector/administrator (70.06%), a teacher trainer (35.93%), a colleague (39.52%), a researcher (4.79%), or their students (16.17%). The perceptions of teachers who had the experience about that practice were again diverse: while one third found it as a very useful activity to improve themselves, one third said it was a little useful and the remaining ones indicated that it was not useful at all. The analysis of the comments made by teachers, who found the observation experience useful to a certain extent, was very similar to their comments related to being observed by student teachers: they improved themselves in terms of planning and implementation of a lesson. For example, Teacher 108 mentioned that he benefited from the inspector's comments about using the board more effectively to solve his problems and about the importance of file-keeping, and that he learned from a teacher trainer that he was always considering the students as the ideal ones rather than seeing the realities of the classroom. In another comment, one teacher said: '*My colleague with 30 years of experience made me aware that I was making the class time enjoyable. A native speaker colleague commented that I was able to modify my language use according to students' levels. All these left a positive impression on me.*' (Teacher 99).

A majority of teachers (72.06%) indicated that they had never observed a colleague in the classroom whilst some of them (27.94%) had this experience at least once. The analysis of the explanations by 36 teachers related to their experience showed that they benefited from this experience in terms of teaching methods/techniques, classroom management, and relationship with the pupils. One teacher wrote about her experience as follows: '*I concentrated on her* [the observed colleague] *communication with the students and how she transmitted the content. After the class, we talked about the experience. We both benefited a lot.*' (Teacher 40). Another teacher commented on his experience about observing a native speaker teacher: '*I found out that a native speaker teacher's techniques are more focused and increase student motivation. I also learned once again that pronunciation was very important in language teaching.*' (Teacher 6).

3.2 Sentiments

As for the emotional attitudes of the teachers, first, their willingness to be knowledgeable about classroom observation was elicited. Although the number of teachers who attended courses, seminars, or conferences on foreign language learning/teaching or classroom observation was low, the majority of them (89.71%) stated that they were enthusiastic to take part in such events.

The participants were also asked if they would be willing to observe a colleague in his/her classroom. Most of them (81.86%) indicated that they would be volunteers to act as an observer in a colleague's class. Teachers who were hesitant to play the role of an observer in such an experience were the minority (18.14%). Those who would not be willing to participate in such an activity indicated two main reasons in general: lack of time and the disturbing effect of

observation on the observed teacher. Teacher 121 was even very harsh about it; he said: '*I find it humiliating*'. In contrast to those adverse ideas, teachers had good reasons to become volunteer observers in their colleagues' classrooms. Those reasons were categorized under four main themes: seeing different techniques and methods, making comparisons, providing constructive feedback, and having fun. For example, Teacher 26 indicated the need for getting feedback learning about innovations: '*Is there something s/he does different from me? Did the pupils like it? If yes, I'd like to use it in my classes*'. They would also like to compare their own practice with their colleagues' as Teacher 49 said, '*It gives me the chance to see someone else's performance about managing the class, compare them with my practices*'. Some others believed that it is an opportunity to give feedback rather than to get feedback: '*It's a pleasure to give feedback*' (Teacher 49). Finally, it was seen as an activity to be conducted for fun for some teachers. Indeed, the comments put forward that these teachers were mostly willing to observe their colleagues to benefit from an opportunity for professional development.

Teachers were also asked about their preferences related to who they would like to be observed by (Figure 2). They preferred being observed by a teacher educator or a colleague rather than a researcher, a student teacher, or pupils in their classrooms. They were not at all willing to be observed by an administrator or a school inspector.
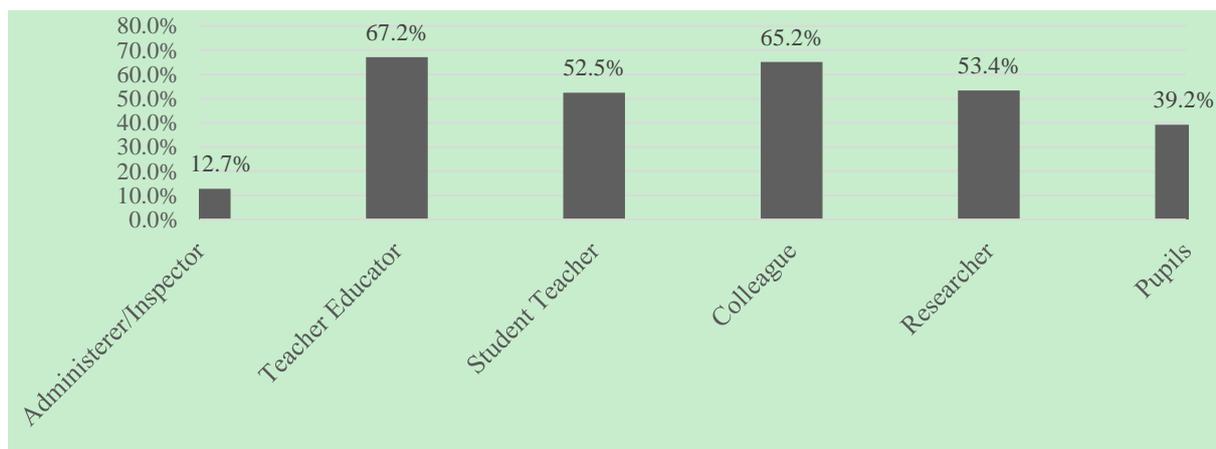

Figure 2. Who would you like to be observed by?

In another question, teachers' preferences related to their willingness to be observed by a native speaker were elicited. This question was not included in the previous question regarding their preferences (Figure 2), but formed as a separate item within the idea that native speaker observation might be an assorted consideration for foreign language teachers. As a result, 80.88% of the teachers said they would be willing to be observed by a native speaker while a small portion (19.1%) did not show eagerness. The analysis of the comments made about native speaker observation showed that the ones with negative feelings about being observed by a native speaker were mainly concerned about three points: anxiety of making mistakes in language use, system in Turkish schools, and overall negative attitudes towards observation. Fear of making mistakes related to pronunciation in English was the major concern for teachers (Teachers 2, 19, 21, 33, 118, 138, 149, 204). In addition, teachers were concerned about the fact that they were not using English in their classroom as the system pushes them. Teacher 32 commented ironically: '*He/she* [the native speaker as observer] *will be French to Turkish educational system*'. In contrast to these negative attitudes, the mainstream attitude was positive within the following benefits of being observed by a native speaker: getting feedback about language use, objectivity of the observer, and gaining experience about observation practices. Many teachers believed that it would help them see their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom in terms of English use. As Teacher 203 stated, '*if he/she* [the native speaker as observer] *is a teacher educator at the same time, I wouldn't miss the opportunity to get feedback on both my teaching skills and use of English in my classes*'. Some teachers thought that native speaker observation would be more objective as the aim of observation would not be evaluating teacher performance.

In order to find out the teachers' views related to taking action on classroom observation, they were questioned about their willingness to take part in an observation activity. 73.53% of the teachers were positive about taking participating actively in a group working on classroom observation whereas 26.47% were not very positive about it. Teachers with positive feelings about contributing to an observation activity as a professional development opportunity held the following particular reasons: gaining self-confidence and motivation for teaching, learning about innovations, identifying learning problems, and gaining experience about the concept of observation. For example, Teacher 137 believed that observation could be an effective tool to prevent many problems in the classroom. She further mentioned: '*Students' needs can be easily identified through observation; therefore, I'd like to go for observation*'. Teacher 159

even went further: '*I would like to try anything that might change my stand in the classroom, anything that would help me improve my skills as a teacher*'. On the other hand, there were two main reasons for the negative reactions: heavy workload and suspicions about the usefulness of an observation task. Teachers with reasons related to workload did not mention any specific reasons different from saying 'I have no time' or 'I'm busy' whereas some teachers honestly stated that they did not believe in the usefulness of a classroom observation activity. For example, Teacher 61 said, '*I believe that the most important shortcoming of a teacher is not knowing about learners' self-discipline, sharing work, awareness of responsibility, and carrying moral values. I think this activity* [classroom observation] *cannot find permanent solutions to the problems and cannot go beyond teaching that is completely opposed to the nature of learning*'. In another comment, Teacher 40 was more pessimistic about the previous practices: '*The ones up to now have not been useful. Some people earned money and had their vacations. Some others spent money and had their vacations. Participants could not find the opportunity to use what they learned. Constant and unnecessary changes in practices always resulted in destruction*'.

In response to the question '*Would you be willing to be observed in your classroom?*', a majority of the teachers (67.65%) were found to be eager to be observed in their English classrooms while some of them (32.35%) were not very eager. A number of reasons for the positive attitude towards classroom observation were identified after the analysis of the comments made by the teachers with positive ideas: learning about strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, gaining self-confidence and motivation for teaching, and keeping themselves updated. For instance, Teacher 105 summarizes the positive attitudes towards classroom observation as follows: '*Classroom observation can be a very valuable tool to reflect on my experiences and to make self-evaluation*'. All of these ideas were the reflections about the usefulness of classroom observation as a source of feedback for the sake of professional development. Nevertheless, teachers indicated some conditions for the observation to be a fruitful activity. According to them, the observation must be conducted by an expert in the field of ELT. Teacher 170 stated: '*This* [classroom observation] *takes me all the time further. But, the person who will do it should be my teachers, not other unexperienced people who can't even speak this language*'. Teachers who did not consider being observed as a problem were also asked about their preferences about the method of observation. Most of them preferred observation notes (85.78%) while half would go for a video recording (50.49%) and some would prefer audio recording (21.08%). These findings showed that teachers would not be concerned about being observed via either method. In contrast to the positive attitudes, teachers with a negative attitude towards being observed were mainly concerned about the anxiety-provoking effect of observation. Many teachers made comments such as '*It makes me nervous*' (Teachers 2, 9, 27, 59, 119, 174), '*I won't be natural*' (Teachers 126, 165, 191). Some, on the other hand, had more specific reasons: '*I don't believe that such a practice in my present school will not give good results*' (Teacher 12).

3.3 Readiness for action

As for the practices of teachers related to their professional development, they were asked to indicate how they reflect on their experiences in general. Table 2 presents the preferences. According to the findings, teachers mostly preferred reflecting on their experiences by thinking about what they did in the classroom to learn lessons from their own experiences. Making informal talks with the colleagues was the second most frequently preferred action for teachers to reflect on their experiences. It is clear from the analysis that teachers were mostly hesitant to note down their thoughts as a way for keeping records or reading published materials as a way of evaluating their teaching. Some teachers indicated that they had different ways to reflect on their experiences. Among these were following language teacher forums and social media groups on the Internet, keeping teaching diaries and portfolios, and examining the test results of their students. For example, Teacher 24 stated, '*I keep a kind of booklet by filing the lesson plans, teaching materials, and worksheets from a lesson that I was able to accomplish my learning outcomes*'.

Table 2. How do you reflect on your experiences?

	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Total
Reflecting on the lesson (reviewing what happened in class)	1	19	79	102	201
Speaking informally to colleagues	3	47	95	58	203
Speaking to my pupils	13	74	73	39	199
Reading articles and books on language teaching/learning	15	108	50	22	195
Speaking formally to colleagues (seminars, department meetings, etc.)	18	132	38	14	202
Noting down my thoughts	79	77	31	10	197

Teachers were further asked about the points that they consider most while evaluating their own teaching. Table 3 shows their preferences. The analysis revealed that teachers were considerate about all of the aspects given to them:

relationship with pupils, teaching language skills and areas, teacher motivation, and finding ways to improve their teaching skills.

Table 3. What aspects do you generally consider while reflecting on your teaching?

	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Total
Relationship with students (discipline, motivation, etc.)	1	8	103	92	204
Your own motivation	0	24	83	96	203
Methodological aspects (teaching grammar, oral skills, etc.)	1	26	113	62	202
Improving your teaching ability	0	18	91	89	198

Further questions were about the pluses and minuses of classroom observation in EFL classrooms. First of all, they were asked if classroom observation would bring advantages, disadvantages, or both. More than half of the teachers (58.82%) indicated that classroom observation would bring advantages while some of them (37.25%) thought it would convey both advantages and disadvantages. Only a very small portion of teachers (3.92%) believed that it would be disadvantageous for their teaching.

The qualitative analyses of the comments made by the teachers regarding the advantages of classroom observation in foreign language classrooms revealed four main categories: providing feedback about strengths and weaknesses, leading to more careful planning and preparation, leading to self-reflection, and raising awareness about classroom issues. Indeed, almost all of the comments were centered on the beneficial effect of classroom observation as an opportunity created for professional development. Some ideas from different teachers related to the usefulness of classroom observation were as follows:

> Two heads are better than one: Maybe s/he is using a technique that I'm not aware of. I see it, and I can use it (Teacher 82).

> It allows me to see my weaknesses or mistakes. I can find better answers to my question 'How can I do it better?' with the help of someone else. The feeling of being observed pushes me to be better prepared and conduct better teaching (Teacher 103).

> It is possible that I can see my weaknesses through self-reflection. But self-reflection may be a limited and highly subjective action. Someone else's observation will help me see the things I missed. It can present a different perspective of teaching methods. After the observation, I can be more aware of my problems, and I can improve my own methods and techniques (Teacher 105).

> It creates awareness. New theories may appear with experience, and it can turn into a great advantage if these can be put into practice (Teacher 99).

In addition to the beneficial aspects of classroom observation, teachers' comments on its downsides were analyzed in a qualitative manner. The analysis revealed four main categories of disadvantages: anxiety and stress, subjectivity of the observer, loss of motivation, and workload related to pre- and post-observation sessions. Some ideas from different teachers related to the handicaps of classroom observation were as follows:

> The observee teacher might not behave naturally as s/he would know that s/he is being observed. Also, s/he may not feel comfortable in such an environment (Teacher 96).

> It can cause stress and inhibit teaching in a natural way. This may negatively affect pupils, who are already prejudiced about English (Teacher 146).

> I will be demotivated when I see my mistakes (Teacher 165).

> If it requires reporting, the report writing process might be exhausting (Teacher 46).

In addition to the questions in the questionnaire, the teachers were also asked about anything they would like to mention about classroom observation. The comments were all positive remarks either thanking for such a questionnaire or further comments regarding the benefits of observation. For instance, Teacher 111 commented: '*Thank you very much for this questionnaire. It helped me think about this topic again and again for my professional development*'. In another comment, Teacher 194 said, '*It* [classroom observation] *must be a genuine experience, must not deviate from its real purpose. Now I'm able to get everything off my chest* ☺ *thanks for this survey!*'

4. Discussion of the Findings

In response to the first research question, the findings reveal that most of the Turkish EFL teachers do not have the

adequate know-how about classroom observation. What is more, neither classroom observation nor other professional development opportunities are very close to a considerable number. When the teachers holding graduate degrees are extracted from the whole, it is easy to predict that the sample was not very familiar with professional development opportunities including classroom observation. However, they find classroom observation as an important issue in teacher development despite their limited knowledge about it.

Turkish EFL teachers' experiences related to classroom observation were two-folded: their roles as observers and their roles as observees. While the former type of experience is quite limited, the latter type has been tasted by almost all teachers at least once in their teaching careers. In fact, teachers are observees when the school inspectors or administrators are in their classrooms for assessing and evaluating their teaching performance; hence, the observation experience is not basically carried out for professional development or within the personal demands of the teachers. When the inspector/administrator observation is set aside, then it is easy to predict that those teachers do not have much experience as observees, either. However, there comes out the need for specific outlets for observation where EFL teachers can actively take part in team-work practices or research projects to be carried out by academics working at teacher training institutions (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). The beneficial effects of peer observation and setting team work organizations in schools on EFL teachers' professional development have been documented in many studies in all over the world (Alwan, 2000; Arsene, 2010; Cosh, 1999; Donnelly, 2007; Pollara, 2012; Zuidema, 2014). In the Turkish context, peer-teaching in foreign language classrooms is mostly limited to practices of teacher trainees (Course, 2014; Gürsoy & Karatepe, 2006; Kavanoz & Yüksel, 2010); therefore, there stands out the need for those activities for the various benefits it will give.

As an answer to the second research question, the sentiments of the teachers indicate that Turkish EFL teachers are enthusiastic about participating in classroom observation activities as both observers and observees as it is perceived as a useful activity to improve their teaching by grasping different techniques and methods, despite the meager experience they have. The hesitations of some teachers are mostly related to lack of time and the disturbing effect of observation on the observed teacher. These types of unwillingness can be taken as normal as teachers are not familiar with classroom observation activities for professional development; and as there will always be some teachers opposing this sort of ideas as part of their personal characteristics. Both as observers and observees, teachers would like to actively participate in an observation activity to increase their self-confidence and motivation, to be informed about advances in the field of ELT, and to find out pupils' learning problems. The hesitations of the minority about being observed by and observing a colleague are limited, but worth citing. Heavy workload is the main concern to teachers for the role of observing a colleague in his/her classroom. It is already a common assertion that EFL teachers in Turkey suffer from high levels of burnout the main reason of which is the heavy workload (Mede, 2009; Unaldi, Bardakci, Dolas, & Arpaci, 2013). For the role of an observee, teachers, who are not eager for being observed by a colleague, believe that it is a good idea only if they are observed by an expert in the field. In other words, they think that it is compulsory that they learn from someone who knows about classroom EFL teaching better than they do. As a matter of fact, the findings do not correlate with Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2011) work in which teachers were rather reluctant about taking an active part in a classroom observation group as they were too busy for such an activity that might result in failure. The suggestion for the teacher educators and school administrators might be operating observation programs that at least assure success in terms of teachers' professional development and that are easy-to-conduct within school hours in order to change the negative ideas of those unenthusiastic teachers in our study and others due to a lack of time.

The willingness of or teachers in this study about being observed and observing might be due to the fact that most of the participants were rather young. According to Bettinelli (1998), teachers with experience less than five years are very eager about being observed in their classrooms whereas more experienced and older ones do not usually favor having their teaching observed. The younger the teachers less embarrassed they are about performing in front of other colleagues. In addition to the age factor, a better predictor of the hesitations related to classroom observation might be the consequence of the unfamiliarity of teachers with an 'observation' activity as they also mentioned in the questionnaire. It would not be an overestimation if we claimed that teachers would have been more willing for a classroom observation activity if they had lived similar experiences in their teaching lives. The young population of English teachers in Turkey, then can be turned into an advantage; that is to say, university research projects and/or educational administrators should not miss the opportunity to engage those enthusiastic young teachers in classroom observation activities to enhance their professional development.

Our teachers are enthusiastic about being observed by a teacher educator or a colleague more than researcher, student teachers, or pupils. This feeling indicates the desire of the teachers to benefit from others' ideas in the process of observation rather than being assessed or evaluated because they believe that teacher educators or peers will be there to help them improve their teaching. Our teachers were holding the idea that observation should be for professional development rather than for assessment purposes as the common practice is conducting such activities for appraisal

purposes rather than developmental concerns (Cosh, 1999; Lam, 2001), which can be damaging for teachers' self-confidence and for an compliant teaching atmosphere (Cosh, 1999). However, EFL teachers in different school settings worldwide believe that the primary objective of classroom observation must be for professional development (Arsene, 2010; Lam, 2001; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011; Wang & Seth, 2001). Therefore, the optimum conditions should be maintained for EFL teachers for peer-observation and supervision-through-observation activities to enrich their know-how related to classroom events and procedures.

Teachers' eagerness to allow for the observation by a native speaker was also an indicator of these positive sentiments. Native speaker observation, as Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) suggests, might be a concern for many teachers because of the anxiety it creates upon teachers of English as a language, which is not theirs. It is absolutely normal for some of these teachers to possess such concerns as most of the Turkish EFL teachers do not have the chance to spend time in English-speaking countries, and for that reason, they may not have the necessary self-confidence in their use of the target language, just like their Italian colleagues (Bettinelli, 1998). As Horwitz (1996) mentions, non-native teachers of English are advanced language learners. Moreover, According to Britten (1985), EFL teachers face the embarrassment when their performance is observed and evaluated by peers or trainers; however, this discomfiture is at its highest point when they need to cope with their use of English. Our teachers, then, are courageous enough for being observed by colleagues, by trainers, even by native speakers. Although it is not possible to insert a native-speaker observation mechanism into every teacher's teaching experience, some teachers might benefit from such practices, especially with the help of university-level research projects. The addition of a native-speaker observation component to EFL classrooms will obviously help teachers for their personal, linguistic, and instructional development.

The preferences of teachers for the observation method is a matter of tension and usefulness together. Most of the teachers prefer to be observed via observation notes as they are probably anxious about being recorded while they do not prefer audio recordings as they would not reflect the real atmosphere at the time of observation. In fact, Cooper (2015) believes that observations in the form of online portfolios are a must if we want to have an up-to-date, cheap education. Teachers of today and tomorrow should be encouraged to vigorously employ videos of their own routines: "This is because having the competence and skill to identify issues from such videos is fundamental to highly effective, advanced reflective practice and self-awareness/ self-development/ self-analysis/ self-evaluation and self-improvement" (Cooper, 2015, p. 90).

In a discussion to the third research question, it is obvious that our teachers are not reflecting on their teaching experiences in a systematic way as they typically prefer reflecting on their experiences by thinking about what they do in their classrooms and by making informal talks with the colleagues. In fact, reflection is valuable only when it is systematic and critical (Farrell, 2008). On the other hand, the reflection methods of teachers are worth citing despite the limited number: reading articles and books on language teaching/learning, noting down the thoughts, following language teacher forums and social media groups on the Internet, and keeping teaching diaries and portfolios. Even though it is not regular or methodical enough, teachers are sympathetic about in their reflections about their own teaching in terms of their relationship with learners, teaching language skills and areas, teacher motivation, and finding ways to improve their teaching skills. As Salas and Mercado (2010) states, reflective practices such as team observation and video or audio recording feedback sessions with volunteer teachers are enterprises that lead to professional development. However, there is always a need for a systematic working for observation practices to result in fruitful experiences. As a support to this idea, Chinese teachers recommend that classroom observation be conducted on a regular basis, and that it comprise more teachers to take part (Wang & Seth, 1998). Thus, providing teachers with systematic and friendly observation opportunities will eventually improve themselves as reflective practitioners.

The advantages of classroom observation outweigh the disadvantages according to Turkish EFL teachers. As stated by the teachers, classroom observation is a valuable source of feedback about strengths and weaknesses of teachers' teaching. It also triggers careful planning and preparation in the foreign language classrooms. Moreover, classroom observation is an appreciated motive for self-reflection. It is evident in the literature that being observed leads EFL teachers to recognize their inadequacies well and to cope with the classroom concerns, which eventually results in improved teaching skills (Rahmany et al., 2014). Similarly, a sustained observation program is very effective in changing teachers' classroom practices in a positive way with the help of the feedback received from colleagues (Lawson, 2011). More specifically," those teachers who were open to the possibilities of change did engage with the process and, in subsequent observations, demonstrated improvements in their ability to engage, stretch and challenge their students" (Lawson, 2011, p. 334). According to Wang and Seth (1998), classroom observation is "not only an educational and pleasant experience but also a collaborative learning opportunity which enabled teachers and observers to learn from each other" (p. 210). Furthermore, according to Cosh (1999), "teaching is an art and not a science, and this art can best be developed by a 'reflective' view" (p. 26). Additionally, EFL teachers are able to respond to, test and value their own teaching to take decisions on essential modifications to develop approaches, views, and experiences with the

help of reflection. Thus, the facilitating effect of classroom observation for teachers to become more reflective in their practices is worth mentioning. As Xu (2009, p. 39) states:

> The classroom becomes a kind of laboratory where the teacher can relate teaching theory to teaching practice. Classroom observation and reflection enable the instructor to refine the theory and adjust teaching practice. Concepts that the teacher acquires through reading and professional development are absorbed into the theory and tested in the reflective practice cycle. This cycle of theory building, practice and reflection continues throughout a teacher's career, as the teacher evaluates new experiences and tests new or adapted theories against them.

Finally, classroom observation helps teachers become more aware of the classroom matters. According to Wichadee (2011) "it is dangerous if the teachers are unaware of their behaviors in classroom" (p. 19). For instance, they may follow their preferences, may like teaching one skill more than others, may interact with some students more than others, and might be unsupportive or discouraging for students with accomplishments. These actions may impact learners in a negative way in the process of learning a foreign language. In other words, "teachers' lack of awareness about their behavior certainly lessens their classroom effectiveness (Wichadee, 2011, p. 19).

The disadvantages of classroom observation, on the other hand, are few, but effective enough to keep teachers away from taking action on classroom observation practices. The main problem is anxiety. Anxiety of being observed is a great concern to many pre-service EFL teachers in Turkey (Coşkun, 2013; Merç, 2011; Paker, 2011), now we find out that it is also a big worry among in-service teachers. The sources of the anxiety described here were mainly due to the possible undesirable comments and even the negative evaluation of the teaching performance. According to Wang and Day (2002), such kind of fears may even turn to feelings of isolation, which might create more serious problems for teachers when the experience turns into a 'win or lose' one (McBride & Skau, 1995). Just like the recommendation for the pre-service teachers, the observers should not be in great expectations (Rieg, Paquette, & Chen, 2007), they should rather try to enhance the inner feelings of teachers that it is for their professional development. Another obstacle is the possible subjectivity of the observer, which might result in a loss of teacher motivation about participating in classroom observation. ESL teachers in the US context had also complained about the subjective judgment of the observer/supervisor after being observed (Wang & Day, 2002). We also know that Turkish teachers in schools have very strong ties as friends rather than colleagues, which is the result of the social context of Turkey: a rather collectivist society. Hence, teachers are probably very concerned about the possible gossips about their possible bad performances. The issue of professionalism, here, needs to be given to teachers by means of counseling and guidance to help them overcome these negative ideas. Liu's (2008) suggestions to overcome this anxiety are worth citing: teachers should improve their content knowledge; they should gain more experience in teaching and observation processes, they should become better prepared; and finally they had better ask for help from others. Finally, Wang and Day's (2002, p. 15) questions should be answered if the purpose of classroom observation is to endorse professional development: "What is the purpose of classroom observation? Whose responsibility is it to reduce the inevitable 'invasive' effects of the presence of the observer in the classroom? How can the observer make classroom observation informative and empowering? What kind of feedback invites dialogue and promotes change among teachers?" Complete answers to these questions will absolutely result in a more effective classroom observation practice.

5. Conclusion

Turkish EFL teachers mostly hold positive beliefs about the nature and implementation of classroom observation. Their mainstream feelings regarding classroom observation are positive as well. Finally, they are almost ready to take action in a classroom observation activity as a tool for professional development as it holds more advantages than disadvantages. Most of the negative ideas, on the other hand, are centered on conditions such as anxiety, lack of time due to heavy workload, which could be overcome by an implementation of classroom observation in a friendly manner with colleagues or expert who are ready for action.

Similar studies concerning the attitudes of foreign language teachers' towards classroom observation can be conducted in diverse educational settings. In this way, the picture reflecting the foreign language teachers' beliefs, preferences, and readiness for action related to classroom observation will be clearer. The next step of this inquiry, on the other hand, should be to organize classroom observation activities. We believe that documenting the emerging results will contribute to the professional development of Turkish EFL teachers.

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